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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the assessment process as it exists today in the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative (NYCALI), and explores a few changes in direction and in practice currently underway. It highlights the national context of concern surrounding literacy assessment, and summarizes the debate over standardized testing and other forms of assessment. The assumptions and conclusions of those holding different positions on appropriate ways to measure the progress and achievements of adult learners is briefly reviewed. Data on assessment as practiced in NYCALI programs is presented. The discussion includes information on standardized test scores as well as descriptions of other forms of assessment being developed and currently in use by New York City programs. Conclusions center on recommendations for improving the quality of assessment in NYCALI programs in ways that will inform funders, policymakers, practitioners, and students. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education) (VWL)

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PERSPECTIVES ON ASSESSMENT FROM THE NEW YORK CITY ADULT LITERACY INITIATIVE

A CRITICAL ISSUES PAPER

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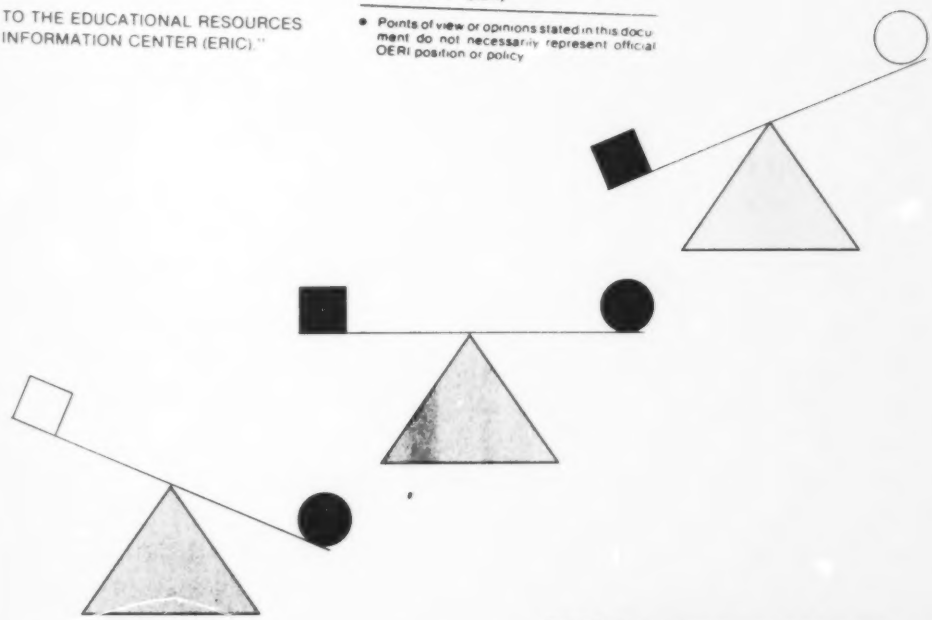

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Perspectives On Assessment From The New York City Adult Literacy Initiative

A CRITICAL ISSUES PAPER

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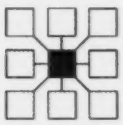

November 1991

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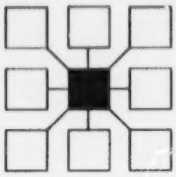


PREFACE

This is the third in a series of critical issues papers prepared periodically by the Literacy Assistance Center in New York City. Each publication presents, in summary fashion, information on a specific aspect of adult literacy.

Perspectives on Assessment from the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative examines one of the most pressing issues facing education today. Educators in all systems, in every state, are searching for ways to assess more effectively the impact of education on students and on their learning. Further, they seek to understand which combination of assessment techniques will provide appropriate, meaningful and fair evaluation of learners' achievements.

These quests for understanding may be of even greater importance in adult literacy programs, where students participate voluntarily, where their backgrounds are extraordinarily diverse, and where their reasons for participation are varied and complex. For example, some students seek to improve their employment opportunities, others to participate more actively in their communities and churches, others to expand their ability to help their children academically, and still others to gain a richer understanding of their new country and its systems. As literacy professionals strive to make basic education relevant to adult students' goals and aspirations, they also struggle with finding approaches to assessment that will support their educational efforts.

In this paper, Deborah D'Amico-Samuels reviews the assessment process as it exists today in the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative (NYCALI), and explores a few of the changes in direction and in practice currently underway. Graphically, on the cover of this report, we have attempted to portray a balanced view of different assessment approaches so that the strengths and weaknesses of each can be understood.

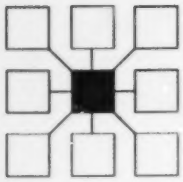
The recommendations present challenges and directions for the future, keeping in mind that assessment must focus on adults' special needs, their learning goals and their aspirations for using enhanced literacy skills.

We are grateful for the critical input of many practitioners in NYCALI programs, and extend our sincere thanks to Ed Noriega for his careful and thoughtful art work and to Cristina Di Meo for her exceptional work in preparing this manuscript for publication.

The purpose of this paper, and of the entire series of critical issues papers, is to provide information that will enhance the understanding of adult literacy students and programs in New York City and lead to improved basic education services. We hope that the information presented here pushes the dialogue on assessment further, leading to a greater balance among varied approaches to assessing, understanding and measuring learner achievements and program outcomes.

Karen Pearl
Executive Director

November 1991



INTRODUCTION

Assessing the impact of adult literacy instruction is of major concern to policymakers, funders, program administrators, practitioners, and adult learners. This paper will review the national context of concern surrounding literacy assessment, and summarize the debate over standardized testing and other forms of assessment. The assumptions and conclusions of those holding different positions on appropriate ways to measure the progress and achievements of adult learners will be briefly reviewed. Data on assessment as practiced in New York City Adult Literacy Initiative (NYCALI) programs will then be presented. This discussion will include information on standardized test scores as well as descriptions of other forms of assessment which New York City programs use or are developing. Conclusions will center on recommendations for improving the quality of assessment in NYCALI programs, in ways which inform funders, policymakers, practitioners and students.

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

Contemporary public discourse on literacy reflects the degree to which education is held responsible for many negative trends in U.S. society. Rising unemployment and homelessness, unacceptably high dropout rates, the declining status of the U.S. in the global economy, escalating drug use and violence, and a host of other socio-economic problems are often blamed on the failure of our nation's schools. Likewise, school reform or restructuring, along with adult education, is sometimes presented as a panacea for all of our social and economic ills. These high expectations for education ensure that debates over instructional theory, and by implication, assessment, will be politically and emotionally charged. At issue are differing definitions of literacy, different beliefs about effective instruction, competing images of adult learners and their goals and varying predictions concerning workforce demography and workplace literacy requirements.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE PURPOSES OF ASSESSMENT

Involved in the debate over appropriate and meaningful assessment are the different vantage points of funders, employers, policymakers, teachers and learners. Politicians accountable to local, regional and national electorates need easily understood measures of impact and progress and clearly demonstrated outcomes. They may share with policymakers and funders the need to make broad comparisons among large groupings of students. These requirements are best addressed by standardized tests. However, as many funders and legislators are aware, such instruments do not capture the critical thinking abilities important to potential employers of adult learners. In addition, questions have been raised about whether standardized instruments are appropriate for measuring the capacities of learners as diverse as those

enrolled in NYCALI programs. For these and other reasons, many policymakers have become interested in improving such tests, combining their measures with other forms of assessment, or devising new ways of evaluating learning gains.

In addition to scores which rank students according to standardized criteria, classroom teachers require assessment instruments that recognize the degrees of progress adult learners make and the variety of ways in which these are manifest. They need tools to assist them in planning curriculum, understanding the goals of adult learners, and assessing their pedagogy. Some teachers may wish to develop such tools for use in addition to standardized tests. Others may feel they learn very little from the standardized test scores of their students, and so rely on or develop a range of alternative methods which capture the learning progress and problems of diverse students.

Program administrators may recognize these needs and welcome the development of alternatives to standardized tests, but have to reconcile their use with goals for program-wide achievement and evaluation as well as with funding requirements. Adult learners often need to take standardized tests for a variety of reasons, including job placement. Thus, they may feel frustrated if their test results do not reflect their efforts and achievements. They may see little relation between the test material and what they have learned in their classrooms and in their daily lives, and may be insulted by scores which compare their abilities to those of children. At the same time, they recognize that their scores on such tests are often important to employers and others.

National, regional, program and individual learner assessment all involve attempts to understand the impact of adult education programs on learners' literacy. However, there are differences in the goals of each kind of evaluation, resulting in different choices and combinations of assessment methodology.

APPROACHES TO LITERACY AND ASSESSMENT

Literacy as Autonomous Skills

Those who view literacy as a set of skills, autonomous or independent of the context in which these skills are used, tend to favor instructional approaches which stress mastery of the mechanics of reading and writing (i.e., spelling, grammar, phonics, etc.) Standardized tests, which ask learners to respond to questions based on a given text and to make choices among items based on grammatical rules, may be seen as fairly accurate measures of student abilities by those who see literacy in this way (Hill & Parry, 1988, pp. 1-11). This does not preclude the use of other kinds of assessment tools; portfolios of student work, for example, can include examples of mastery of literacy skills.

Multiple Literacies

Those who see literacy as embedded in socio-cultural contexts argue that adults may read and write for different purposes and with varying degrees of competence, depending on the task at hand, its meaning, and its setting (Szwed, 1981; Reder, 1988). Reading is seen as an active process, in which the reader interacts with the text and the context, drawing on his/her own experience in deriving meaning from what is written. According to this view, literacy practices vary with cultural and class factors. Ethnographic work in U.S. communities provides evidence for multiple literacies, or a variety of ways in which literacy can be acquired and practiced (Fishman, 1990; Heath, 1983; Lofty, 1990; Miller & Vander Lei, 1990; Petrosky, 1990; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Wikelund provides a definition derived from this conception of literacy:

> Literacy is a culturally organized system of skills and values learned and practiced in specific settings (Scribner & Cole, paraphrased in Wikelund, 1990, p. 5).

For these researchers and practitioners, a meaning-centered and experience-based instructional approach allows learners to draw on their own experiences and literacy goals in the process of learning to read and write. Such whole language methods emphasize the process of making meaning through reading and writing. Concern with the mechanics of spelling, grammar and sound-letter correspondence may act as a barrier to the beginning reader/writer and is secondary in this approach. Approaches to assessment based on this conception of literacy tend to stress individualized and small group processes which value the role of learners in assessing their own work. These methods, often called alternative

assessment (meaning alternative to standardized or uniform tests) or authentic assessment (emphasizing the goal of information which tells you about actual reading behavior) are described in the section on Alternative Assessment, with examples given in New Directions in Learner Assessment: Examples from NYCALI programs.

Standardized Tests

The term "standardized" means that all test takers will be given identical directions, time limits and questions, and will be graded according to the same criteria. Such tests are usually paper and pencil multiple choice instruments (National Commission on Testing and Public Policy, 1990, pp. 2-3). Traditionally, scores on adult standardized tests in reading are translated into "grade level equivalents." Such equivalents imply comparability between the grade level adult learners are assigned based on their test scores and the performance of youngsters in the corresponding grades on the same tests. However, in programs where the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) is used, the grade equivalent is actually a theoretical relationship between the test performances of adults who take the TABE and youth who take standardized tests appropriate for their age.

Standardized tests are relatively easy to administer and grade; for these reasons, they are cost-effective. The scores attained make it easy to compare individuals and programs, as well as city, state and regional groups of test-takers. The numerical scores yielded by these instruments are thought to be less subject to possible bias than the judgments of individual teachers. Because of these advantages, standardized tests are widely used. For example, it is estimated that 105 million such tests were administered in the 1986-87 school years throughout U.S. public schools (Business Council for Effective Literacy [BCEL], 1990, p. 1). Standardized tests are often used as critical indicators of student and school success, and as such are vested with considerable power. The same is true for the field of adult education:

> Assessment in adult literacy is a central issue with high stakes. The authority vested in these [standardized] tests can determine the way programs are developed, what is taught, and the climate of teaching and learning. It shapes legislation and the funding policies of public and private agencies. It is tied to welfare eligibility for young parents. It drives government job training programs. It can deny entry into the military, or crucial access to a diploma or a job (BCEL, 1990, p. 1).

Other Assessment Methods

Critical reflection by students on their own work often forms an important part of the assessment strategies and procedures used in this approach. Adults may be asked to choose some of their written work for a portfolio, and to comment on what they like about their selections and what they would like to improve. Or, they may participate with the instructor in setting goals for themselves and in periodically evaluating their progress. Interviews with adult learners, at intake and after a specified number of hours of instruction, may serve as a vehicle for assessing what adult learners want to be able to achieve with improved literacy and whether or not they are making progress toward their goals. Teacher and peer observations, student readings accompanied by discussion of meaning and reading strategies, performance on simulations of tasks important to learners in their lives, and compilation of portfolios of work are examples of alternatives to standardized testing (BCEL, 1990, p. 7; Lytle & Wolfe, 1990, pp. 51-57; Palmer Wolf, 1989; Valencia, 1990).

While these methods are labor intensive and highly individualistic, they are also organically related to the content of instruction and to learners' lives and goals. They allow adults to evaluate themselves and each other in terms of their goals for their own lives and the progress they have made on tasks and skills they have identified as important. As such, they respond to the diversity of adult learners and the varied ways in which they learn. The results inform both the teacher and learner.

The main disadvantage to alternative and authentic forms of assessment occurs at the level of program evaluation and policymaking, when it becomes necessary to compare student performances and assess learning on a broader scale. As yet, no methodology has been developed that allows non-standardized assessment to be quantified in a way that meets the need for such evaluation and research data.

Competency or Performance-based Assessment

One advantage of some alternatives to multiple choice standardized tests is that they more closely mirror how learners perform tasks requiring different kinds of literacy in their daily lives. Coupled with the debate surrounding the validity of standardized scores, this advantage has resulted in the continual refinement of instruments used to test large numbers of students. For example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) study done in 1985 on a sample of young adults used simulation tasks designed to measure a range of competencies in three kinds of literacy: prose, document and quantification. The purpose was to draw a more sophisticated picture of the abilities of young adults based on tasks which approximated the ways they use literacy in daily life. Drawing on the insights and practices of the whole language approach, the NAEP is currently adding sample portfolios to its assessment of fourth and eighth graders and working on refining its simulations of adult contexts for its 1992 assessment of adults (Mullis & Jenkins, 1990).

Other kinds of evaluation which build on some of the goals of authentic assessment while meeting the needs for more measurable data on learning progress are competency based assessment and the use of curricula with identifiable completion points. An emphasis on performance, however, can also result in highly standardized assessment and curricula. The California Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS), a statewide standardized curriculum and testing package, developed a list of competencies for Basic Education (BE) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs and designed teaching and testing materials tied to these. These competencies consist of tasks adults might be expected to perform as consumers, workers and citizens. Critics of CASAS believe that when all teaching and learning activities are subsumed under a list of pre-identified skills, teachers and students are denied the opportunity to participate creatively in the learning process. They argue that a standardized list of competencies does not respond to the diverse needs and experiences which adult learners bring to the classroom, nor does it encourage the development of critical thinking among learners regarding the social roles they are expected to perform (Auerbach, 1986). Competency-based testing is often motivated by a concern for functional literacy, to which we now turn.

Employment, Policy and Functional Literacy

Definitions of functional literacy are clearly related to concerns regarding economic development, national goals and employment issues. These definitions may involve national, international or workplace-specific standards of literacy and vary greatly through time. For example, Barton and Kirsch point out that a century ago, the literacy standard in the United States was the ability to sign one's name; fifty years ago, this standard made a huge jump, to a fourth grade reading level, while twenty-five years ago, an eighth grade reading level became the frequently used standard (1990, p. 2). These changing standards reflect the history of our economy as well as the relativistic nature of functional literacy. According to materials heralding the World Conference on Education, held in Thailand in 1990:

> The scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures, and inevitably, changes with the passage of time (1990).

In the contemporary U.S., factors affecting the economy add urgency to these debates over the definition of literacy, the role of adult learners in fashioning their own literacy, what constitutes effective instruction and how the literacy of adult learners should be evaluated. Studies such as the Hudson Institute's Workforce 2000 drew attention to the changing demands of the contemporary workplace and demographic changes in the U.S. workforce (1987). Although there is disagreement over whether or not the majority of new jobs will require more educated workers, certainly most of the more desirable positions will. Researchers at the National Center on Education and the Economy argue that the decline of the U.S. manufacturing sector offers employers choices which have different national consequences. They favor raising both the skill and wage level of U.S. employees, and cite the positive experiences of companies who have chosen this path (1990).

The need for more educated and technologically skilled employees converges with increasing proportions of minorities, women, immigrants and elderly workers in the nation's workforce. Members of these groups have often been excluded from the workplace, as well as from educational opportunities, because of discrimination based on race, language, age or gender. Assessment of adults for job-readiness must take into account the actual requirements of existing and anticipated jobs and the role of literacy per se in providing access to employment.

Functional literacy is a social and economically motivated concern with what adults can do in real situations and as such may draw from either of the two approaches to adult education discussed above. A workplace literacy project may emphasize reading and writing in a job-specific context, as did a Center for Employment Training project designed for single mothers and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. While the project's approach emphasized literacy as skills, these skills were taught in the context in which they were used, rather than in a classroom setting. No standardized testing was done; rather, the success of this project was measured by the proportion of participants who attained jobs and by their salary levels. While these evaluation measures were not standardized, they were easily quantified and performance-based (BCEL, 1991, pp. 6-7). Another example of performance-based assessment is the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a 1985 study which aimed to simulate adult contexts and situations in order to assess varying literacy abilities on a variety of tasks.

The Report of the National Commission on Testing and Public Policy, reflecting a similarly pragmatic orientation, recommends the use of a variety of assessment techniques. The Commission bases this recommendation on the changing needs of our economy and social institutions, which give testing and assessment new goals. Standardized tests have been criticized as culturally-biased, particularly against minorities. Given that a significant number of new entrants to our workforce and of young people in our schools are from historically disempowered social groups who have not fared well on standardized tests, the Commission concluded:

> Our central finding is that many current practices in education and employment testing stand in the way of efforts to identify and develop talent and to improve the functioning of key social institutions (1990, p. 5).

Reasoning that "in part, group differences in test scores simply reflect social realities," the Commission stated that the use of such scores alone to allocate opportunities compounds existing social inequalities. A key finding of their research was that "no single form of assessment can shoulder the unbearable weight of being the sole measure of worth." While they recognize the utility of a standardized test as a "tool of institutional accountability," they recommend that these be used in concert with "carefully crafted assessment devices [which] would ask students to supply answers, perform observable acts, demonstrate skills, create products and supply portfolios of work" (pp. 13, 27, 30).

The work of the Commission is important to consider alongside the debate over a national assessment device which would monitor progress on the national goals for education which emerged from the National Conference of Governors in 1990 (Report on Education Research, 1991). Pointing out that the testing industry is itself accountable to no one, though its products are used for accountability purposes by institutions, the members of the Commission caution that:

> Fair test use would seem to require at the very least that the inadequacies of technology should not fall more heavily on the social groups already burdened by effects of past and present discrimination (p. 29).

The Commission advocates changing the purpose of assessment from a gatekeeping function to one which facilitates, rather than restricts, opportunities for children and adults to demonstrate their abilities.

Some states, such as Vermont and California, are attempting to design statewide assessment procedures which reconcile their accountability demands with critiques of standardized tests and the benefits of more qualitative assessment methods. Portfolio evaluation and hands-on performance tasks in science are two of the techniques used for assessment of children in some states. Many of the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative programs, whose assessment strategies are discussed in this report, use a mix of mandated standardized tests and alternative forms of assessment.

ASSESSMENT IN NEW YORK CITY ADULT LITERACY INITIATIVE PROGRAMS

New York City's Adult Literacy Initiative (NYCALI) programs reflect the diversity of New York City's population; non-Hispanic whites are a minority and there is considerable ethnic and national diversity among those of African, Asian, Latin American and European descent (Roberts, 1991, p. B1). Adults in Initiative programs bring with them a wide range of experiences, skills, goals, and attitudes toward literacy. The educational and support services provided throughout the Initiative attempt to address these diverse needs and expectations. Thus, classes are offered in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Basic Education (BE), Basic Education in the Native Language (BENL) and Mathematics (Math); programs offering each of these types of instruction, in turn, may be characterized by a variety of instructional and assessment methodologies.

Assessment is used in NYCALI programs for purposes of initial placement at the appropriate instructional level, programmatic evaluation, contract and funding compliance, reporting and research, as well as for understanding learning progress which occurs as a result of receiving instruction (gain). The latter may be measured according to numerical increases in uniform test scores, or by other indicators of student achievement.

UNIFORM TESTING AND THE NEW YORK CITY ADULT LITERACY INITIATIVE

NYCALI programs are required to report gains achieved by their students, as measured by two tests: the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) for BE students and the oral/aural John Test for ESOL students. At the recommendation of the TABE developers, the instrument is not used for those below the 3.0 grade level. Adults enrolled in BE, BENL and mathematics classes must be tested within their first 12 instructional hours. ESOL programs must administer the John test within the first 36 instructional hours. Post-testing generally takes place after a program cycle or semester, or after a specified number of hours.[1]

While the TABE has been criticized for many of the same reasons as have other standardized instruments, it does provide a cost-effective basic skills test in which all items are normed on adults (TABE, 1990). Based on an extensive and competitive selection process, the TABE was chosen as the instrument best suited to the needs of the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative.

Developers of the TABE have continued efforts to make the content relevant to adults. These efforts have had varying success (Hill & Parry, 1988). The 1987 version of the TABE was developed to address process and critical thinking skills, abilities identified as increasingly important to many employers and educators.

TABE scores are reported in a variety of ways; these include grade level equivalents, raw scores and scale scores. Scores can also be referenced to group norms which reflect categories of adults who commonly take the TABE (such as BE/GED students, vocational and technical school students). In addition, scores can be used as possible predictors of General Equivalency Diploma scores, by comparing TABE scores of NYCALI students with the GED scores attained by a norming group which took both tests. The potential for reporting scores to students, funders and policymakers in terms other than grade level equivalents is an important feature of the TABE. Students can be given raw scores, for example, which are less insulting and

[1]City and State program guidelines regarding post-testing are as follows: students in classes which meet nine or fewer hours weekly should be post-tested at the end of each one-hundred instructional hours, students in classes that meet 10 or more hours per week should be post-tested at the end of each 200 instructional hours; students in tutorial programs should be post-tested after every 50 contact hours. Contact hours represent the number of hours students spend in the classroom receiving instruction. If 10 students attend a 2 hour class, this would count as 20 contact hours.

more meaningful than grade level equivalents. Devising ways to make scale scores an acceptable and understandable way to report Initiative gains is an important task for programs, policymakers, funders and researchers.

The John Test, an oral placement test for non-native speakers of English, is based on learners' responses in English to a series of pictures depicting a typical day in the life of "John." Student responses to the pictures are used to measure oral comprehension, ability to produce a narrative and to ask questions. In NYCALI programs, the John Test is also used to measure gain among students who have been in programs. An important consideration when using change in John Test scores in this way is that the test was not designed to measure gain, but only to place students in appropriate instructional levels. Beginning in July 1992, the John Test will be replaced by the New York State Placement Test for English as a Second Language (NYSPLACE) for ESOL placement and assessment. The advantage of the NYSPLACE is that it discerns the intermediate levels of English proficiency with greater precision than the John Test.

Beginning in the fall of 1991, literacy screening was introduced in ESOL programs. The instrument to be used was designed by Dan Rabideau of the Literacy Assistance Center to provide a sense of the native language literacy abilities of students and has been translated for use with Spanish, Chinese and Haitian Creole speakers. Students are asked to fill out a personal information form which requires one word or yes/no responses, to read silently four short narratives of gradually increasing difficulty and to provide a writing sample. The purpose is to collect important background information on students which can be used to plan appropriate curricula.

For Spanish-speaking adults enrolling in BENL classes, the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) is used to determine the appropriate instructional level.[2] This test is a Spanish language adaptation of a standardized test used by some California school districts for grades 1 through 8. It is a multiple choice format instrument and is normed with reference to performance by children in these grades. There are plans to replace the CTBS with the Spanish Assessment of Basic Education (SABE). Because the SABE was developed in Spanish, rather than translated from an existing English instrument, it may more accurately assess the abilities of Spanish-speaking learners. Developers of SABE also claim it is more culturally relevant than translations of tests developed in English. Like the CTBS, however, the SABE was designed for use with children.

[2]BENL programs in languages other than Spanish choose appropriate instruments for their language of program instruction.

UNIFORM MEASURES OF GAIN IN NYCALI PROGRAMS

Gains are measured by comparing students' pre-and post-test scores on the previously described tests. The percentage of students post-tested is affected by when students enroll; those who enter a program late in the year or semester may not have spent sufficient time with the program to merit testing. In addition, some students leave programs before the required number of hours necessary for post-testing.

Gain on the TABE was initially defined by New York City and State as an increase of one or more years in grade equivalents; gain on the John Test (which is scored from 0 to 100) was defined as an increase of 20 or more points. However, because it was widely felt throughout the Initiative that lower test gains could indicate considerable improvement among adult learners, these definitions of gain were revised in 1988. Since that year, a .5 increase on the TABE (or a half-grade equivalent) and a 10 point increase on the John Test have been accepted as demonstration of gain. Regarding the latter, questions can be raised about the use of the John Test to measure achievement; as stated above, it was designed to assess students for purposes of placement.

Table 1 shows the percentage of students for whom both pre- and post-test scores were available, and the percentage of students who showed gain during the first three years of the Initiative, when the original definitions of gain were in place.

TABLE 1

STUDENTS POST-TESTED AND SHOWING GAIN

1985 - 1987

STUDENTS	BE	ESOL	ALL
FY 1985			
% of students post-tested	47.9%	59.7%	54.5%
% of post-tested students with gain	43.8%	38.0%	41.0%
FY 1986			
% of students post-tested	45.4%	52.7%	49.5%
% of post-tested students with gain	43.6%	32.2%	36.9%
FY 1987			
% of students post-tested	60.2%	68.5%	64.1%
% of post-tested students with gain	51.2%	35.7%	42.1%

Data source: New York City Adult Literacy Initiative Final Reports

As indicated, the proportion of post-tested students showing gain dropped slightly from 41.0% in 1985 to 36.9% in 1986. Thereafter, it increased to 42.1% in 1987, the highest for the three fiscal years. Among BE students, 43.8% showed gain in 1985; the comparable figures for 1986 and 1987 were 43.6% and 51.2% respectively. However, for ESOL students, the highest proportion of students post-tested registered gain in 1985, while 1986 had the lowest proportion of students with gain.

For the 1988, 1989 and 1990 program years, the revised definition of gain was used. Table 2 shows the percentage of students post-tested and those who registered gain during these years.

TABLE 2

STUDENTS POST-TESTED AND SHOWING GAIN

1988 - 1990

STUDENTS	BE	ESOL	ALL
FY 1988			
% of students post-tested	61.0%	68.9%	64.3%
% of post-tested students with gain	62.0%	59.8%	61.0%
FY 1989			
% of students post-tested	61.9%	68.8%	64.6%
% of post-tested students with gain	64.2%	58.3%	60.7%
FY 1990			
% of students post-tested	61.7%	70.6%	65.3%
% of post-tested students with gain	64.7%	53.2%	57.3%

Data source: New York City Adult Literacy Initiative Final Reports

Using the current criteria for gain, it is striking to note that the majority of students for whom there are pre- and post-test scores registered gain. Looking at the overall population (BE and ESOL students combined), 61.0% of the post-tested students registered gain in 1988 compared with 57.3% in 1990. However, among BE students, the highest proportion of post-test gain was recorded in 1990.

Despite potential shortcomings of standardized tests, their use by Initiative programs has demonstrated some important baseline information (see Tables 3 and 4). The more hours students spend in instruction, the more gain they are likely to show. As might be expected, those whose entry test scores are low achieve the greatest gain (see discussion of "ceiling effect" on page 21).

TABLE 3

MEAN JOHN TEST INCREASE

ESOL STUDENTS' TEST GAIN	1985-1986	1986-1987	1987-1988	1988-1989	1989-1990
ENTRY LEVEL					
Level I	17.4	20.5	20.0	18.4	18.7
Level II	13.9	16.8	15.7	15.3	14.9
Level III	8.6	11.1	11.0	10.8	10.5
Level IV	2.6	4.0	3.6	5.3	4.0
CONTACT HOURS					
< 21	9.9	8.3	10.3	7.4	6.6
21 - 40	11.9	10.0	10.1	8.5	9.8
41 - 60	12.5	12.2	12.7	11.3	11.9
61 - 80	13.2	14.2	13.9	12.2	13.5
81 - 100	13.1	14.0	14.6	13.2	13.7
101 - 120	13.1	16.6	15.7	14.2	14.6
> 120	14.2	18.7	19.4	19.1	17.8

Data Source: New York City Adult Literacy Initiative Data Base

TABLE 4

MEAN TABE TEST INCREASE

BE STUDENTS' TEST GAIN	1985-1986	1986-1987	1987-1988	1988-1989	1989-1990
ENTRY LEVEL					
3 - 4.9*	1.17	1.16	1.13	1.13	1.00
5 - 6.9	.74	1.05	1.01	1.00	1.01
7 - 8.9	.38	.90	.81	.82	.92
CONTACT HOURS					
<21	.66	.54	.57	.93	.76
21 -40	.79	.80	.84	.85	.74
41 -60	.81	.86	.87	.91	.88
61 -80	.89	.86	.91	.75	.96
81 -100	.87	.90	.95	.85	.88
101 -120	1.14	1.04	.86	.84	.96
>120	.92	1.07	1.09	.99	.95

Data Source: New York City Adult Literacy Initiative Data Base

Figures on gain are affected by a number of factors, some of them integral to problems with standardized tests. While tests are notorious for the anxiety they cause test takers, a more important consideration is how this affects test scores and performance. For NYCALI students, test trauma or anxiety may be compounded by other factors, such as prior negative experiences with testing and with the impact of test scores on schooling, length of time away from school and testing, or, in the case of some recent immigrants, little prior experience with either formal schooling or

* NYCALI programs no longer report the test scores of students scoring below the 3rd grade level. The Initiative has no standard indicator for placement or gain for these students, as the producers of the TABE do not recommend it for this level.

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standardized testing. Participation in NYCALI programs is not contingent on test scores; this allows instructors and program intake personnel to mitigate some of this anxiety by reassuring students about the purpose of standardized tests in their particular program.

Because testing before placement can negatively affect students, and consequently, their retention, NYCALI programs are cautioned not to test students before they attend a class. Instead, initial placement can be based on other intake procedures, such as an informal reading inventory and an interview with the student. Some of the other negative effects of testing can be mitigated by practitioners as well. Scores, for example, can be reported to students and explained to them in terms other than grade levels. If the official test forms are intimidating to students, programs can experiment with their own more user-friendly versions. Despite these caveats, it is likely that anxiety regarding standardized tests will continue to affect the numbers of students who register gain according to NYCALI definitions.

Whether or not students register gain is also affected by the length of time they have been in a program at the time of post-testing and by their entry level scores. Test scores are generally subject to "ceiling effect," which refers to the artificial restriction imposed by tests on the range of attainable scores (Borg & Gall, 1979). For example, a student who answers 95 out of 100 questions correctly on a pre-test can at most register a post-test gain of 5 points. On the other hand, a student who scored 20 in the same pretest can improve his/her post-test score by 80 points. This is problematic for data on gain which does not differentiate test takers by entry level score.

Another issue to address concerns post-testing rates and their impact. Not all the students in the Initiative are available for post-testing, and there is at present no measure of how representative those who are post-tested are of the entire student population.

In the field of adult education, regular and systematic collection of aggregate data on gains, particularly on a scale comparable to that of the NYCALI, is rare. Theory regarding the ongoing development of literacy in adults is likewise underdeveloped. Thus, the data on gain in NYCALI, while seemingly modest, can help to inform our understanding of what constitutes progress among adult learners across programs and regions. The use of scale scores in reporting could be used to establish more appropriate conventions for interpreting gain. Although scale scores, compared with derived scores such as grade equivalents and reference group percentile ranks, are not well-suited to direct interpretation of individual performance, their equalinterval

property makes them very useful for a wide range of statistical analysis. Thus, scale scores could be very helpful in statistical comparisons for differences in test gain between various categories of students in the Initiative. When combined with the learner assessment and teacher research being done at the classroom level, this data can be used to shape realistic expectations for adult education programs, services and goals.

OTHER INDICATORS OF PROGRESS IN NYCALI PROGRAMS

While adult learners do not systematically report achievements related to their education to program staff, each year many thousands obtain jobs, register to vote, become U.S. citizens and begin to support themselves without public assistance. Thousands of others advance from ESOL to BE classes or from BE classes to High School Equivalency programs; many others attain their GEDs.

In an attempt to capture some of the less easily measured aspects of the effects of participation in NYCALI programs, the LAC is involved in a longitudinal study of adult learners. During interviews for the LAC study conducted in 1988 and 1989, NYCALI students were asked about the impact of adult education on their lives. As Tables 5, 6 and 7 indicate, the great majority of students reported improvement in their reading, writing and (for ESOL students) English communication abilities.

TABLE 5

IMPROVEMENT IN ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH

	ESOL N = 111		BE* N = 25	
	N	%	N	%
DEGREE				
A lot	31	27.9	18	72.0
A little	70	63.1	6	24.0
Not much	10	9.0	1	4.0
CAUSE				
Program	83	82.2	18	75.0
Program and other factors	10	9.9	3	12.5
Other factors	8	7.9	3	12.5

*Question asked of non-native speakers of English who said their English had improved.

Data source: Adult Learners' Perceptions of Literacy Programs and the Impact of Participation on Their Lives (Phase Two of a Longitudinal Study: An Interim Report)

TABLE 6

IMPROVEMENT IN STUDENTS' READING

	ESOL N = 131		BE N = 82	
	N	%	N	%
DEGREE				
A lot	42	32.0	46	56.1
A little	72	55.0	30	36.6
Not much	17	13.0	6	7.3
CAUSE				
Program	91	79.8	58	76.3
Program and other factors	14	12.3	10	13.2
Other factors	9	7.9	8	10.5

Data source: Adult Learners' Perceptions of Literacy Programs and the Impact of Participation on Their Lives (Phase Two of a Longitudinal Study: An Interim Report)

TABLE 7

IMPROVEMENT IN STUDENTS' WRITING

	ESOL N = 132		BE N = 83	
	N	%	N	%
DEGREE				
A lot	36	27.2	39	47.0
A little	67	50.8	23	27.7
Not much	29	22.0	21	25.3
CAUSE				
Program	84	81.6	56	90.3
Program and other factors	9	8.7	2	3.2
Other factors	10	9.7	4	6.5

Data Source: Adult Learners' Perceptions of Literacy Programs and the Impact of Participation on Their Lives (Phase Two of a Longitudinal Study: An Interim Report)

In addition to the information found in these tables regarding improved skills, responses to other interview questions indicated that the skills of the study participants had improved in ways that positively affect work performance (for employed interviewees) as well as ability to help children with schoolwork and to interact with school personnel (for respondents who are parents). Increased independence and self-esteem, as well as the growing ability to take on the literacy demands of shopping, health care, transportation and community activities were also reported. Similar self-reported assessments have been integral to some statewide evaluations of adult education. Darkenwald and Valentine, for example, used interviews to gather self-reports about program impact for the state of New Jersey (Wolfe & Lytle, 1989, pp. 26-27).

INITIATIVE-WIDE ASSESSMENT ISSUES

For funders of NYCALI programs, assessment choices must respond to a host of considerations shaped by educational goals and fiscal realities. In order to present this perspective, City and State policymakers were interviewed for this report and their views are summarized here. According to John Casey, until September 1991, the Director of Adult Literacy for the New York City Mayor's Office of Education Services, the need is for "a unified system that can make statements about students' learning and be used to support and justify adult education programs." Garrett Murphy, Director of Continuing Education Planning and Development for New York State, links the demand for accountability to the increase in funding for literacy and the need to prove the benefits of adult education to legislators and the tax-paying public. Because real life impacts of adult education, such as obtaining a job or getting a promotion, are complex outcomes affected by many factors outside the purview of adult education services and because they would involve costly and difficult tracking of individuals, academic achievements, such as test scores, are conventionally used for large scale assessment.

Casey stresses the need for a mix of assessment practices, which together address the diverse needs of learners, practitioners, program administrators and funders. Accordingly, the 1991 guidelines for program funding indicate that appropriate evaluation and assessment, which take into account learner goals and which involve students as decision makers, are priorities. While recognizing the many drawbacks of standardized tests, Casey maintains that they do allow us to make some statements about learning achievements, especially regarding the different rates of gain associated with the varying reading levels of entering students. Such achievement standards can

also serve as a safeguard against marketing claims associated with commercially produced reading packages that promise to deliver literacy within a short, specified time frame. Because standardized tests are often used in our society to structure access to jobs, training or education, Casey asserts that adults should be prepared to take and interpret such tests, and this preparation is part of the job of adult education programs.

Within the limits of standardized instruments, Casey feels that the TABE is a reasonably good predictor of reading ability, though the performance of an individual on the TABE does not "mirror the reading process." He cautions, however, that this predictive power does not apply as strongly to the top- and bottom-range scores. The TABE, because it also uses scale scores, does allow for the development of an alternative to reporting scores as grade levels, something Initiative programs can and should explore.

Murphy, from the New York State Education Department, expresses a need for agreement among practitioners, administrators and funders on the goals of adult literacy education, which could then lead to generating an assessment package with a variety of tools and techniques. Key to implementation of curricula and assessment tailored to these goals would be staff development which allowed teachers to contextualize, organize and select materials appropriate for their learners. With such a system in place, standardized testing could be done on a sample of learners for each program to evaluate broad program and regional gains. However, the interest at the national level in a standardized test may preclude development of such alternatives.

Assessment of beginning readers poses additional challenges for those concerned with adult education. Murphy reports that New York may be unique in providing classroom instruction for large numbers of beginning readers and writers; other states often rely on volunteers for these learners. This population is a mandated priority according to the terms of legislation on adult literacy, but there is no standardized instrument which can be reliably used at this level.

All of the policymakers interviewed would like to work with programs and practitioners on quantifying some of the results of assessment alternatives to standardized tests. Russell Kratz, Chief of the Bureau of Continuing Education Field Services for the Division of Continuing Education Programs of the New York State Education Department, is particularly intrigued by the kinds of behavior changes adult learners might report such as "being able to write a note, help a child with homework, or read the TV guide instead of flipping channels to see what's on." He would like to see assessment which combines academic improvement as reported by test scores and indicators of behavioral changes reported by teachers and learners or

assessed in groups of peers. This would provide a more multidimensional picture of adult learners across programs.

Although Initiative-wide needs mandate a standardized instrument for purposes of measuring achievement and guiding placement, both City and State policymakers recognize the criticism and limitations of such measures and the burgeoning development of other forms of assessment. Murphy asserts that standardized tests do not serve the goal of documenting individual progress well, and that judgments based on interactions between student and teacher should be the basis of evaluation at this level. Casey expresses particular interest in the work done on intake processes in a number of Initiative programs and in the potential for incorporating some of this work throughout the Initiative. Murphy points out that the external high school degree program provides a precedent for the use of portfolios and demonstrated competencies without paper and pencil testing. Funders need reporting mechanisms that capture the complexity and individuality of some of these alternatives and tools that can be used across an array of programs. Both State and City officials in adult education are committed to working with NYCALI practitioners in developing these.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN LEARNER ASSESSMENT: EXAMPLES FROM NYCALI PROGRAMS

Many practitioners in NYCALI programs have been developing and working with a variety of assessment methods and tools over the past several years. These alternatives to standardized tests approximate "windows on students' ways of knowing" according to Michael Parker, Director of the BE program at the Borough of Manhattan Community College of the City University of New York (CUNY). As such, they serve multiple purposes for learners and teachers. These include appropriate placement by program and instructional level; a variety of measures of development and achievement in reading, writing, communicating and other uses of literacy; documentation of how the process of learning proceeds for individuals, and communication about program philosophy, structure and operation.

Assessment has been the focus of many staff development activities and special projects throughout the Initiative. Two issues of the *Information Update* (a journal published by the Literacy Assistance Center) have focused on assessment (March 1987 and September 1989), and an Assessment Group of practitioners has been meeting monthly at the LAC for nearly two years. In addition, some recipients of grants and fellowships which support practitioner research have focused on assessment. Space does not permit full acknowledgement of the extensive and ongoing work of the many practitioners, students and others involved in these activities.

The Institute for Literacy Studies at Lehman College of CUNY has been in the forefront of efforts to conceptualize and implement meaningful assessment practices with adult learners and adult education practitioners. Currently, Marcie Wolfe, who directs adult programs at the Institute, is working with a group of NYCALI practitioners in The Adult Educators Development Project, whose mission is "reshaping relationships between assessment and instruction." These efforts reflect some common goals and themes of alternative assessment development among practitioners. One such theme is a focus on the connections among assessment, instruction and staff development through systematic observation and reflection by teachers. Teacher inquiry, combined with discussion and feedback from practitioners and students, lays the basis for assessment grounded in classroom practice and student experiences. This emphasis on teachers as researchers widens the search for appropriate assessment to encompass issues of pedagogy and epistemology as well; teachers observe and document the learning process as it intersects with the diverse learning histories, goals, expectations and abilities of adult learners.

Below, the experiences of a few Initiative programs which are designing and using alternative assessment methods are highlighted.

Centers for Reading and Writing, New York Public Library

Student assessment has been an ongoing concern at the Centers for Reading and Writing. Both staff and students experienced frustration with the inability of standardized instruments to reflect growth in students' reading and writing, and Center staff shared the conviction that assessment should be an integral part of instruction, not an added component. Consequently, a small group assessment model consistent with the program's whole language instructional philosophy was developed. Presently, these assessments are being conducted with tutorial groups; however, Center staff are adapting this approach for use in the Centers' ABE and Saturday writing classes.

The small group assessment model is essentially a focused and reflective discussion which includes a group of students who work together regularly, their tutor and a member of the full-time program staff. A preliminary discussion between the staff member and the tutorial group prepares students for the assessment. Students' goals recorded by the staff during the intake process, along with students' reading and

writing folders, are the subjects of a structured set of questions for individual students and the group. The assessment takes about two hours.

According to Center staff, the model's reflective nature reinforces their learner-centered and process-oriented approach to reading and writing. Because the model draws on the observations of the tutorial groups as well as of the individual, it is consistent with their efforts to foster a sense of shared community among program participants. Center staff also provided for student input into the development of the model; they were asked to comment on discussion questions after reading verbatim transcripts of the initial small group assessments.

Students bring their reading and writing folders to the assessment discussion. The folders contain all of the students' work, rather than a selection. Questions focus on the kinds of things people have read and written since they started: the changes they, their tutors and the group of learners perceive; whether or not reading and writing goals have been reached; what is easy or hard about the work students are doing, etc. One set of questions asks students to discuss how the group has helped members and how they can work together to meet individual and group objectives. The staff member conducting the assessment discussion provides a written summary to all participants for additions and comments, and the final written summary is analyzed by students and teachers and added to students' folders.

The small group assessments provide insight into how adult learners perceive their progress, and how effective instruction is in helping them meet their goals. Students feel a sense of accomplishment and validation about their documented effort and take more responsibility for what they want to learn. In addition, the small group format of the discussion reinforces the sense that members have of being part of a community of learners.

While the students and staff are clear about the benefits of this kind of assessment, Center staff are wrestling with how to make this accessible and meaningful to funders and others interested in adult education, how often to conduct the assessments and how to reflect the changes adults report that are occurring outside the classroom setting. Often, learners' most convincing and significant evidence of change are the new things they can do at work, at home or in the community. Roger Dovner, Director of the Centers for Reading and Writing, is working with staff on ways to make these changes a larger part of the Center's assessment model.

Currently, a group of practitioners from the Centers meets weekly to develop the next phase of this model. This phase involves students in sifting through the contents of reading and writing folders and selecting significant pieces of work for inclusion in

portfolios. Selection criteria depend on the individual students' decisions about what is important to their work, and assessment discussions with others include analyses of these criteria. Students are also encouraged to include significant indicators of progress from their daily lives in their portfolios. Several Centers have already piloted this new phase of the assessment model.

York Learning Center of York College (City University of New York)

Adult educators at York Learning Center refer to the assessment strategies they are developing as "authentic or appropriate" assessment, reflecting their emphasis on what actually occurs when students work on their reading and writing. Their approach to assessment includes a comprehensive intake interview and portfolio assembly by students. Assessment is an integral part of the curriculum, which is characterized by a whole language approach to an experience-based curriculum. Both assessment and instruction are participatory and learner-centered.

At the initial intake interview, students choose their own reading materials from a selection of pieces at various levels of difficulty. The interview is designed to allow learners to demonstrate what they already know, and is conducted by a counselor with an individual student. The aim is to acquire information which will be useful for instruction. Questions probe for learners' attitudes, expectations, and assumptions about education, as well as for students' interests, educational history and literacy goals. Students also select writing topics and at the end of the interview, decide on their levels for instruction.

The information provided to teachers assists them in selecting curricular materials and in making decisions about classroom activities. For example, one class at York Learning Center, composed primarily of students from the English-speaking Caribbean, did considerable work with a song by Jamaican reggae singer Bob Marley. Using the song as a basis for reading, writing, vocabulary building, social history and critical interpretation, a sense of mastery was acquired. Such classroom activities produce the folders of materials from which students select pieces for their portfolios.

Portfolios consist of a selection of materials which demonstrate progress and change. A York Learning Center student's portfolio typically contains samples of student writings, reading logs and a series of checklists which record the instructor's observations of behaviors and accomplishments which demonstrate change. For example, the checklist related to "ownership of reading" asks whether students are

developing their own preferences regarding reading material, whether they increasingly share information about what they are reading, etc. Another checklist focuses on students' abilities to assess their own learning, and a third type aims at providing a window on changes in students' participation in Learning Center and classroom activities, such as sharing their writing with others. Together with other entries in the portfolio, these provide a holistic way of looking at student progress. Over time, improvement in skills and increased ability in written expression become evident. The portfolio is also the basis for student self-assessment; students are asked the reasons for their selections, as well as for their thoughts on their own progress and problem areas.

According to Jane MacKillop, Director of the York Learning Center, portfolio assessment grows directly out a desire to link assessment with instruction. Portfolios can respond to the view which educators have of learning progress. To design their portfolio assessment methods, the staff at York generated lists of the ways they recognized progress and then looked at which of these could be documented in portfolios and how.

Students from York Learning Center have developed a student newspaper, *Amazing News*, whose production grew out of their discussions and writings about the *Daily News* strike in 1990-91. In addition to the selection and editing skills students have practiced in the compilation of their portfolios, they are learning newspaper layout and design, as well as the scheduling, coordination and organizational aspects of publishing. A student who served as guest editor spoke of how he chose his portfolio essays and poetry, contrasting his satisfaction with the progress he saw in these writings to his negative experiences with standardized tests.

Like many practitioners and program personnel, staff at York are committed to their alternative assessment methods, and share with students the satisfaction of documenting the progress they observe in the classroom. At issue are ways to make the information generated through portfolios accessible to funders and others concerned with achievement at a program or citywide level.

The New York City Public Schools

Exploring assessment alternatives for beginning BE students has been a focus of both staff development and classroom activities in some New York City Public Schools programs. Since September of 1990, Betty Gottfried, a staff developer and BE teacher, has been working with groups of practitioners interested in assessment for beginning readers and writers.

As discussed above, the TABE test is not appropriate for adults whose skills are below the third grade level. Program teachers and staff decide whether to test entering students based on a number of factors. Some may administer the locator test designed for use with the TABE, others may interview students regarding their facility with print. Students may be asked to read passages at a beginning level so that practitioners can observe their reading, or to write their names and addresses on program forms. Instructors may decide that the TABE test would be inappropriate based on their observations of these activities. Alternatively, staff may administer tests designed for beginning readers, such as the Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT).

Teachers of beginning BE students have been working with alternatives to standardized tests which link assessment with instruction. In their staff development sessions, teachers suggested and refined questions and categories to be included in an intake interview. The results were similar to the areas covered in intake interviews discussed above; the learner's educational history, goals, expectations, and motivation are addressed. Sample interviews with students have been videotaped for teachers interested in viewing how they are conducted.

Portfolio planning, development and use as an assessment tool has also been a focus of teacher development and classroom practice. A particularly useful item for the portfolios of beginning readers and writers is the monthly calendar. Students make the calendars themselves; for some these provide a useful introduction to the conventions of written discourse and of print. The notion of recording time in this way, as well as the vertical and horizontal reading of days and dates embedded in a calendar format are new ideas for some learners. Minimally, beginning students can keep a record of their attendance. As they gain facility with reading and writing, they can note what they have read, allowing the calendar to serve as a reading log. They can also indicate when they have written in their dialogue journals. The calendars can thus provide tangible evidence of effort and of the quantity of work done. Over time, they document the increased ability of students and can be used to make connections among attendance, classroom activities and changes in reading and writing. Portfolios

also include samples of student writing and occasional narratives, by both student and teacher, about the student's reading and writing progress.

Writing as an assessment tool for beginning readers and writers is also being explored through the use of dialogue journals. Learners write in these during each class meeting, and the teacher reads the entries and responds. The dialogue journal provides opportunities for instruction as well as for assessment. Teachers can see what discrepancies there are in the learner's use of language for different purposes (i.e., speaking, writing and reading). For example, journals allow teachers to perceive and discuss with students how ideas expressed in writing are sequenced, or what repeated difficulties arise in their writing.

As a participant in the Adult Educators Development Project at the Institute for Literacy Studies at Lehman College, described above, Gottfried is currently focusing for this project on student and teacher perceptions of learning progress. Working with an instructional facilitator in one district, she is researching the form and content of students' oral and written reflections on their learning. The purpose is to look for congruence as well as disparity between teachers' expectations for student self-assessment and students' expressions of what they view as progress. Gottfried is also interested in the impact of adult education on students' lives outside the classroom, and is seeking ways to bring these changes into the assessment process.

Some teachers of beginning BE students express a need for a more formal assessment which would serve as a companion to portfolios and student interviews. Such an instrument is particularly important to beginning teachers who want a more structured way of understanding the abilities and needs of beginning readers and writers. Criteria for a useful assessment tool to serve this purpose, according to Gottfried, include reading passages for beginning readers with adult content, and instructions for miscue analysis which do not overwhelm teachers with logistics for recording.

Development of assessment tools for beginning readers and writers which respond to their particular needs as they begin to work with print materials continues to be the focus of a group of teachers in New York City Public Schools programs. Their work will provide important additions to assessment methods currently being used and developed by other Initiative practitioners.

Literacy Volunteers of New York City

Literacy Volunteers of New York City is a community-based organization under the aegis of the Community Development Agency of New York City. Services are provided in nine learning centers, where teaching is done by trained volunteers who are supervised by the center director. Intake is handled centrally through the Pre-Enrollment Program. Jean Fargo, Associate Director of Education-Evaluation, describes alternative assessment as being continually assessed by program staff, as they work with a model which has been evolving over the past two years. This model was recently the subject of an external evaluation which included writing assessment practices and the use of portfolios; the results are currently available through Literacy Volunteers.

Alternative assessment at Literacy Volunteers has two components. One component is designed to capture students' perception of their own progress and is based on a series of interviews with students over time. The other focuses on compiling data on students' actual reading performance, and compares students' efforts at different points in time.

The first interview of the series is conducted during the Pre-Enrollment Program. This is done by a current student working with a staff member and a trained volunteer. Together, they ask a group of two to four new students a series of questions and record each student's answers. These focus on learning goals, special interests, motivation for seeking instruction, educational history, and current job and family situation. Students are also asked what things teachers should do to help them learn, and whether there are any things teachers should avoid doing. In addition to acquiring information about the student, the interview aims to introduce students to formulating their own learning goals and assessing their progress toward achieving them.

Subsequent interviews are conducted approximately every six months, and provide documentation of learning for students and their tutors. These interviews offer an opportunity for students to examine their own work in reading and writing and the ways in which program participation has affected their lives. Students discuss their immediate reading and writing goals as well as their long-term expectations. During the interview, students' perceptions of their work and accomplishments are documented. Students refer to their notebooks and other records of their reading and writing during the course of the interview. At the end of the interview, students discuss their goals for the next few months. During this process, students, rather than

staff or tutors, become the observers and experts on their own learning.

The other component of assessment at Literacy Volunteers is a reading documentation and assessment by a staff member or a trained volunteer. These are conducted at least once each fiscal year. Using a text the student is currently reading, the interviewer asks questions related to the choice of the material, how long the student has been reading it, the content of the text, etc. The student is then asked to read aloud, beginning from wherever s/he last finished. The interviewer records the student's miscues during the oral reading, and then asks the student to read the same passage silently. Questions focused on comprehension are then asked. The student is also asked to decode words from the same reading, this time presented out of context. The interview also includes questions for the student, the student's tutor and the center director regarding perception of changes in the student's reading. The reading documentation process concludes with a discussion among these people regarding the student's reading strategies and recommendations for future reading work.

The two components of assessment at Literacy Volunteers described above have met their goals of generating rich information and documentation regarding the learning changes taking place for individuals, as well as the aim of communicating the importance of the student's role in learning. The resulting information on how students see change and evaluate instruction allow staff and tutors to discover developments missed during the process of instruction.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite philosophical variety in approaches to literacy, most of those concerned with adult education share some basic hopes and concerns. Most desire that a greater number of adults enjoy a wider range of life choices and educational and workplace opportunities than is currently the case. These shared goals depend in part on more effective instruction, which is what assessment aims to define and inform.

Dialogue which involves funders, program administrators, practitioners, students and others is needed to determine what kinds of information assessment should provide and the best means for acquiring these data. Practitioners working with alternative assessment express interest in meeting with others involved in adult education to discuss these mutual concerns. Professional educational evaluators with experience in a variety of assessment types may be able to devise ways to quantify meaningfully and present information on individual learner assessment for those who need to place such data in a programmatic or broader context. Researchers who have analyzed and documented the social contexts in which adults practice literacy skills can bring to this conversation knowledge and methods for understanding and documenting the effects of program participation beyond the boundaries of the classroom. Because the forces that drive adult literacy are ultimately concerned with its impact in the workplace, family and community, measures of these must be part of assessment planning. Employers and service providers should be part of this conversation, because they are implicated in the goals of both instruction and assessment, especially at this time of greater cooperation between City and State agencies and between the public and private sectors. For example, employers can be sensitized to the possibilities of alternative assessment for providing profiles of potential employees.

Recommendation:

- Forums, seminars and ongoing group discussions involving educators, adult literacy practitioners, researchers, adult learners, funders, policymakers, employers, and social service providers should be convened to consider and make decisions jointly regarding purposes and methods of assessment in adult literacy.

Within NYCALI programs, both standardized and alternative assessment have provided useful information. The administration of uniform tests, such as the TABE, CTBS, John and NYSPLACE allows for broad comparisons of gain and entry level scores to be made across programs. These data provide information regarding who is served by the Initiative, what the impact of instruction is on learners at different levels and the effects of varying amounts of instruction. However, questions regarding the utility and cost-effectiveness of testing large numbers of adult learners at the intervals specified for post-testing can be raised.

Gregory Anrig, the President of the Educational Testing Service, has publicly expressed a conviction that "it isn't necessary to test every child to know how children are doing." While recognizing the need for accountability testing where public funding is involved, he recommends considering cost-effectiveness and efficiency in making assessment decisions, as well as paying more attention to assessment which informs instruction and which is "very different from standardized testing." He cautioned that constant achievement testing uses up time that could be better spent on instruction (Report on Literacy Programs, 1990, p. 186). Given current fiscal constraints and priorities, Anrig's advice is especially pertinent.

Recommendation:

- Policymakers, funders, practitioners and program administrators may wish to discuss exactly what their goals are for standardized testing and whether or not these could be met by testing samples of adults enrolled in NYCALI programs.

Recommendation:

- Standardized testing with a sample of students might be combined with other assessment methods to gather more complete and more varied data on this selected group of learners. The results could provide a richer basis for policy than the information on gains currently offers. However, thought must be given to how sampling will be explained to students, and how being selected for sampling would affect students who are tested. Also, ways to meet the needs for program accountability and research on students at different levels of ability which Initiative-wide testing now serves would have to be devised.

Standardized tests, like other forms of assessment, are continually revised and updated. For example, the Educational Testing Service (ETS) has designed a new set of tests that "incorporate extensive use of open-ended tasks that simulate the use of literacy skills in a variety of relevant adult contexts" (Simon & Schuster, 1991). Linked to the adult literacy frameworks used by the NAEP survey of young adults, these tests measure document literacy, quantitative literacy and prose literacy, and generate scale scores rather than grade levels. While new instruments such as the ETS Tests of Applied Literacy Skills aim to provide a more accurate and sensitive picture of adult learners, they must continue to be critically evaluated for applicability, cost effectiveness and actual advantages in comparison to tests now in use.

Those administering standardized tests can also consider doing so in ways that allow learners to focus more on what they can do and what they know and less on the test itself. Permitting students to ask questions during the testing process or relaxing the time allotted for the test may facilitate this.

While standardized testing seems to pose a clear-cut and simple way to establish literacy standards for a complex population in a complicated urban environment, we must continue to ask what the results of these tests do and don't tell us and to search for alternatives which provide additional information. Given the host of questions raised about the utility of standardized tests, particularly for the kinds of students served by the Initiative, NYCALI programs can benefit from the continued search for more varied and accurate assessment strategies.

Many of these strategies provide a ritual analogous to testing, but with a different focus and process for acquiring information about learning and achievement. Again, the question is whether this kind of individual learner assessment can provide information that is meaningful for program evaluation. If so, how? Should the kinds of documentation generated be summarized, quantified or analyzed for patterns? Should the focus be on refining knowledge about how adults and instructors define and recognize changes in reading and writing, or on evaluating and measuring these changes? If evaluation is a goal, how do values get assigned to what learners do, and do these reflect the values of funders, learners, practitioners and/or others?

Recommendation:

- The development of alternatives to standardized tests has been proceeding in Initiative programs over the past several years, and it may be time to ask programs working in this area to report on what they are doing and what they have learned. The resulting information can be disseminated throughout the Initiative in a systematic way, allowing practitioners and learners to choose among a variety of methods.

Recommendation:

- Because of the diversity of programs and adult students in the Initiative, adopting specified alternative measures for use across New York City programs may be inappropriate and premature. Rather, programs should be given assessment choices, and encouraged to report their findings along with other program data.

Recommendation:

- Program reports can summarize, in ways appropriate to the assessment strategies they have been using, what they have learned from assessment. This will clarify the relation between program evaluation and learner assessment and facilitate the development of both throughout the Initiative. Programs will have the opportunity to provide funders with indicators of their work beyond statistics on enrollment, retention and test scores.

Ultimately, it is improvement in the quality of instruction which will make the kinds of differences students, practitioners, policymakers and funders want to see. Because the theory of adult learning is still developing, assessment which is closely tied to instruction and which documents the learning processes of diverse adults as readers and writers is essential to understanding what constitutes effective instruction for adults.

The National Commission on Testing and Public Policy entitled its 1990 report *From Gatekeeper to Gateway*, emphasizing their conviction that the purpose of assessment needs to be transformed from a method for evaluation and selection to a tool for development and opportunity. This interpretation of purpose is ultimately what is at stake in the debate over assessment, in which adult learners in New York City have much to gain and much to lose. The words of educator Mike Rose, regarding the testing of children, are equally germane to adult literacy assessment:

> In the name of excellence, we test and measure them—as individuals, as a group—and we rejoice or despair over the results. The sad thing is that though we strain to see, we miss so much. All students cringe under the scrutiny, but those most harshly affected, least successful in the competition, possess some of our greatest unperceived riches (Rose, 1990, p. xi).

New York City's current economic and social crises demand that we utilize our resources effectively to develop the rich and varied talents of all New Yorkers; the range of assessment practices in NYCALI programs offers hope and direction for these efforts, as well as opportunity and growth for educators and learners.

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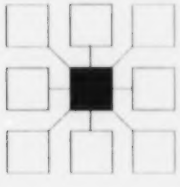

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